

# Why we Need a More Humanistic Positive Organizational Scholarship: Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Approach as a Challenge to Neoliberalism

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## Why we Need a More Humanistic Approach to Positive Organizational Scholarship: Carl Rogers' Person-Centred Approach as a Challenge to Neoliberalism

Recent years have seen much interest in the new field of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). POS focuses specifically on what is positive, flourishing, and life-giving in organizations, and how to cultivate individual and organizational performance. In this article I will discuss the humanistic approach of Carl Rogers and how it can contribute to POS.

Rogers is well known for his work on human relations and like POS he was concerned with the promotion of human flourishing. However, unlike POS, Rogers' approach was based on a distinctive view of human nature and non-directive practice. By comparison, it looks like POS talks the language of human flourishing while offering ways in which to control and direct people as part of the neoliberal hegemony that humanistic scholars might see as the problem. I would like to advocate for a humanistic POS; one which explicitly has the aim of liberation and empowerment.

**Keywords:** Positive Organizational Scholarship; Humanistic; Person-Centered Approach; Carl Rogers

Many people spend their lives working in organizations and all of us are recipients of the services provided by organizations. It is in all our interests that organizations not only function effectively but also that they operate with concern for people as human beings. Since the beginnings of the discipline of psychology there have been those who have sought to apply it to organizational life, often in favor of finding ways to boost productivity and performance, but the last decade has seen a new trend in organization studies towards what has been called Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). Influenced by the ideas of positive psychology, POS brings together scholars from a range of disciplines interested in human flourishing in organizations. Increasingly, organizations are applying research from POS. Resilience training for schoolchildren, mindfulness programs for stressed employees, and attempts to institutionalize well-being, for example, are all now commonplace. POS seems to be a new and important development, representing a contemporary trend towards understanding what makes for a good life, but as I will argue there are also concerns about its misuse.

In this article I will discuss the humanistic approach of Carl Rogers in relation to the theory and practice of POS. First, I will first introduce positive psychology and POS, following which I will describe Rogers' Person-Centered Approach (PCA) to human relations. Many will already be familiar with Rogers' (1957) theory of constructive personality development arising out of empathic, genuine and unconditionally regarding relationships. It may seem uncontroversial to propose that his theory could be applied in POS, to fostering better employee relationships, leadership development, and so on. It may even seem that such ideas are already part and parcel of POS. But as his biographer, Kirschenbaum (2007) notes, much of Rogers' thinking has been so deeply incorporated into theory and practice that these ideas now seem like common sense, such that many scholars who follow in his tradition are likely unaware that this is what they are doing, or recognize quite how radical his theory actually is. I aim to show that a fuller understanding of Rogers'

theory offers a challenge to practitioners in POS. Specifically, I will argue that while practitioners of POS may view themselves as helping to empower people, the contrast of fundamental assumptions with the PCA shows that POS, whilst offering a new focus on human flourishing, by and large, simply remains part of a mainstream neo-liberal culture of controlling and manipulating people. In offering this critical commentary I hope to encourage scholars to put a humanistic core into POS.

## POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

Positive psychology was formally launched by Martin Seligman in his 1998 presidential address to the American Psychological Association (Seligman, 1999). This initiative brought together scholars with one common interest in how to promote positively valued human experiences that to that point had been largely neglected by research (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman later said how the idea of positive psychology came to him following a moment of epiphany when gardening with his daughter, Nikki, who was then aged five, when she instructed him not to be such a grouch. ‘In that moment, I acquired the mission of helping to build the scientific infrastructure of a field that would investigate what makes life worth living: positive emotion, positive character and positive institutions.’ (Seligman, 2014, p. xi). What Seligman realised was that when it comes to understanding problems in living, a considerable amount of time and money had been spent over the years documenting the various ways in which people suffer psychologically, but nowhere near the same effort had gone into understanding what makes life worth living. As such, Seligman resolved to use his presidency to initiate a shift in psychology’s focus towards a more positive psychology.

Since these beginnings, positive psychology has attracted worldwide interest and its applications been developed into many different domains of areas activity (Joseph, 2015). One such development is the field of positive organisational scholarship (POS) (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012a). An extension of organizational scholarship, POS as defined by its pioneers is:

“the study of that which is positive, flourishing, and life-giving in organizations.

Positive refers to the elevating processes and outcomes in organizations.

Organizational refers to the interpersonal and structural dynamics activated in and through organizations, specifically taking into account the context in which positive phenomena occur. Scholarship refers to the scientific, theoretically derived, and rigorous investigation of that which is positive in organizational settings” (Cameron & Caza, 2004, p. 731).

As such, POS

“...focuses attention on the generative dynamics in organizations that lead to the development of human strength, foster resiliency in employees, enable healing and restoration, and cultivate extraordinary individual and organizational performance. POS emphasizes what elevates individuals and organizations (in addition to what challenges them), what goes right in organizations (in addition to what goes wrong), what is life giving (in addition to what is problematic or life-depleting), what is experienced as good (in addition to what is objectionable), and what is inspiring (in addition to what is difficult or arduous).” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012b, p. 1).

POS is therefore concerned with positive states, outcomes, and generative mechanisms in individuals, dyads, groups, organisations, and societies. A related subfield of study is Positive Organisational Behaviour (POB). POB seeks to improve employee performance and organisational competitive advantage by focusing on state-like strengths and positive psychological capacities such as self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resiliency (Luthans et al., 2006). POS and POB have changed the face of organizational studies in recent years with topics such as hope, optimism, resilience, strengths, grit, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence becoming the focus for empirical work and theorising, and acting as stimuli to influence change within organizations toward positive approaches (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

However, while some of these terms may be new, the idea of taking a positive approach was not entirely new, and there is much in POS and POB that is reminiscent of the field of humanistic management, which also seeks to promote human flourishing and add value to society (Von Kimakowitz et al., 2010). In fact, arguments similar to those put forward by Seligman had been put forward decades earlier by the first generation of humanistic psychologists (Robbins, 2015). One of the early pioneering humanistic psychologists to put forward such arguments was Carl Rogers.

## THE HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY OF CARL ROGERS

Carl Rogers was one of the pioneers of the humanistic psychology movement in the 1950's. One of the characteristics of humanistic psychology was that it was concerned with human flourishing. Humanistic psychology came to be known as the third force following the first force of psychoanalysis and the second force of behaviourism. Humanistic psychology addressed the fact that the previous ways of thinking in psychoanalysis and behaviourism had

not been concerned with the full range of functioning. As Sutich and Vich (1969), editors of *Readings in Humanistic Psychology*, wrote:

“Two main branches of psychology – behaviorism and psychoanalysis- appear to have made great contributions to human knowledge, but neither singly nor together have they covered the almost limitless scope of human behavior, relationships, and possibilities. Perhaps their greatest limitation has been the inadequacy of their approach to *positive* human potentialities and the maximal realization of those potentialities” (Sutich & Vich, 1969, p. 1).

The concept that Rogers developed was that of the fully functioning person (1963a). According to Rogers, the fully functioning person: (1) was open to all of their experiences, that is to say they are sensitive to the world around them, other people’s reactions, and their own internal feelings, reactions, and meanings; (2) lives existentially, able to be fully present in the moment; and (3) able to trust their feelings and reactions to guide them in their actions. Such a person has a non-defensive attitude, is able to listen to others empathically, unconditionally, communicate clearly and effectively, and respond to situations creatively. In this way, Rogers was describing people at their best and he was moving away from the then prevalent deficit based model of human experience. In contemporary terms, Rogers’ concept of fully functioning would be described as a form of eudaimonic well-being. In this way, Rogers has come to be recognised as one of the forerunners of modern positive psychology (Linley & Joseph, 2004).

But Rogers is best known as the originator of Client-Centered Therapy (Rogers, 1951) and for his statement about the necessary and sufficient conditions for constructive personality development (Rogers, 1957). In this he hypothesized that an unconditionally

regarding, empathic, and genuine relationship is the right social environment to facilitative people's movement towards constructive personality development, and becoming more fully-functioning.

Unconditionality implies a non-directive attitude towards the other person. The heart of Client-Centered Therapy is respecting the other person's right to self-determination with the understanding that it is when people experience themselves as self-determining agents they will make the best decisions for themselves that they can, and that as a result will move in the direction of becoming more fully functioning. This is more complicated than it sounds because to respect someone's right to self-determination it has to be for its own sake, not because it achieves another desired goal - a point I will return to below when I discuss the more goal-directed nature of POS.

Beyond the 1960's, Rogers began to apply his ideas derived from Client-Centered Therapy in other contexts, such as education, conflict resolution, and encounter groups, presenting his vision in various books, such as *On Personal Power* (Rogers, 1977), and *A Way of being* (1980). As such, the term Person-Centered Approach (PCA) began to be used to recognize the broader applicability of his theory about how relationship conditions released a tendency towards actualization in the direction of people becoming more fully functioning. In this way, Rogers' vision was far beyond the therapy room, for applied psychology, education, and human relations, in which he envisaged a society in which relationships mattered. Rogers was well aware of the wider applications of the PCA but wrote little that directly applied it to organizations (Kirschenbaum, 2007).

Rogers died in 1987. But the legacy of his work continues. Many scholars across disciplines of education and learning, business and management, and psychology and psychotherapy acknowledge the importance of empathic, genuine, unconditional relationships as providing healthy social environments. It has been recognised that the



philosophy of the PCA has applicability in numerous contexts (Cornelius-White, Motsching-Pitrik, & Lux, 2013), including in institutions and organisations, with the aim of transforming communication (Motschnig, & Ryback, 2016), developing person-centered leadership (Plas, 1996) introducing innovation management (Haasis, 2013), managing conflict transformation (Stillwell, 2013), overcoming resistance to change (Coghlan, 1993), offering process consultation (Coghlan, 1988), and leadership coaching (Kauffman, Joseph, & Scoular, 2015), and from working with individuals, to teams, departments and whole organizational systems (Coghlan, & McIllduff, 1999).

As such, the notion that POS could benefit from a deeper understanding of Rogers' theory of human relations might seem uncontroversial. After all, what could be problematic about advocating better human relations and seeking to promote human flourishing in workplaces? Is that not what POS is striving to do? But, as I will discuss in the following section, the idea of a humanistic POS is much more controversial than it might seem. A humanistic POS would be more radical in its approach to empowering and liberating people.

#### A CRITICAL LOOK AT POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH

While some humanistic psychologists were critical of Seligman for not giving due credit to the earlier work of scholars such as Rogers (Taylor & Martin, 2001), others argued that positive psychology provided a conceptual home for all those interested in optimal human functioning and recognised that despite the validity of the criticisms, Seligman had succeeded in bringing these forgotten ideas back into the mainstream agenda of scholars (Linley & Joseph, 2004). But while it is true that the move towards studying human flourishing is to be welcomed, positive psychologists and now POS have left behind the most vital part of the humanistic approach - its view of human nature.

Positive psychology was seen by many as a shift in the everyday business of psychology, which it was, but as Seligman (2004) himself made clear, it was not a paradigm shift. Positive psychology continued to operate within the same paradigms as mainstream psychology – essentially still that of the behaviourist or psychoanalytical view – that is to say the image of the human being as a blank slate on which anything could be written or the image of the human being as driven by destructive impulses. Humanistic psychology, on the other hand, did represent a genuine paradigm shift because it proposed a potentiality model in which people were instead motivated towards constructive behaviour.

Specifically, the core concept of Rogers' (1959) theory is the *actualizing tendency*, a directional tendency inherent in all organisms towards its maintenance and enhancement in ways that are basically social, constructive, self-organizing, with an inherent tendency toward growth, development, and integrated functioning, when functioning freely. This is a view of human nature that remains controversial but has considerable support in the more recent work of Ryan and Deci whose Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) provides the same meta-theoretical perspective as the PCA, i.e., that human beings are inherently proactive, self-organizing systems (see, Joseph & Murphy, 2013; Patterson & Joseph, 2007; Sheldon, 2013).

As already noted, Rogers' work is more well known for his statement about the necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic constructive personality development (Rogers, 1957). In this he hypothesized that providing an unconditionally regarding, empathic, and genuine relationship is the right social environment to facilitate people's movement towards constructive personality development. These relationship conditions provide a safe and non-threatening, non-judgmental social environment, which lead a person to function freely, to be self-accepting, able to drop their defensive strategies, and to be self-determining.

Less well understood is that this hypothesis of promoting self-determination is based on the above image of the person; i.e., it is *only* hypothesized that these relationship conditions are helpful because it is assumed that people will move in directions that are social, constructive, self-organizing, toward growth, development, and integrated functioning (Rogers, 1959). For Rogers, the relationship conditions were about empowerment and liberation, trusting that people will move in constructive directions if given the opportunity. But if this assumption is not held, what would be the purpose of offering an unconditional relationship? Unconditional regard when offered with an intention and wish to change the recipient in a specific direction is no longer unconditional; but a disguised and manipulative form of conditional regard.

This is what is so distinctive and radical about Roger's approach. When the conditions of unconditional regard, empathy, and genuineness are interwoven and used within his theoretical framework they lead the practitioner to take a non-directive approach, in which the client is viewed as their own best expert, and who can be trusted to find their own ways forward. There is no need for external direction. The imposition of direction from others undermines the ability of people to find their own direction. It is this aspect of Rogers' theory that makes its practical application so radical and challenging to mainstream institutions and organizations which predominately are based on the contrasting philosophy that people need external direction. As Henry (2015) wrote:

“In terms of much of their day to day practice, many mainstream organizations seem to operate from a negative orientation, that is bureaucratic control procedures, a problem- solving orientation, and a competency framework for development (p. 371).

In most organizations there is little that would be recognized as the genuine application of values and ideas from Rogers or the other humanistic psychologists. Henry (2015) goes on to contrast this with organizational scholarship:

However, much personal, group, and organizational development has been framed more positively with the accent on success, good practice, intrinsic motivation, recognition, learning from mistakes, the need for a vision, empowerment, and respectful relations” (p. 371).

POS certainly uses language that sounds humanistic but does it really apply the values and ideas? By and large, I would argue that it doesn’t. In the index of the *Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship* (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012a), there are only two page references to Carl Rogers, one to person-centered personality theory, and one to humanistic psychology. These few mentions are in three chapters in a handbook of 79 chapters. This shows that the work of Rogers and that of the PCA is barely acknowledged within POS.

The first reference to Rogers is in the chapter by Stephens, Heaphy and Dutton (2012) on high quality connections, in which they note that empathy as discussed by Rogers can facilitate quality connecting. The second reference to Rogers is in the chapter by Cooperrider and Godwin (2012) on positive organization development, in which they note Rogers’ influence through his development of encounter groups in conflict ridden societies. The references to person-centered personality theory and humanistic psychology is in the chapter by Kopelman, Avi-Yonah, and Varghese (2012) on the mindful negotiator, in which they propose that Rogers’ approach provides a positive conceptualization of social interactions

aligned with POS, in which the relationship conditions discussed by Rogers of empathy, unconditional regard and genuineness enable more effective negotiations.

What is striking is the lack of attention to the full detail of Rogers' work in these chapters; so much more could be said about Roger's work and its similarity to the ideas discussed. But these are the chapters that do provide some acknowledgement and historical lineage; the point is that across such a massive handbook, POS seems to make little reference to Rogers or to the humanistic approach. As already mentioned, so much of Rogers' thinking has been incorporated into theory and practice as common sense that many scholars who follow in his tradition are likely unaware that this is what they are doing. But there is an obvious applicability; it is of note that the three chapters just mentioned fall into different sections of the handbook, positive relationships, positive human resource practices, and positive leadership and change, respectively, showing the potential breadth of application. Indeed, the PCA has a long history of application in the workplace. As Massarik (1992) in his discussion of the humanistic core of industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology wrote:

“Carl R. Rogers' influence on the humanistic in I/O psychology as well has been far reaching. Particularly his approaches to client-centered therapy...have affected directly, or have been infused indirectly into numerous styles of interviewing in industry and organizations, for the most eclectic purposes: employee counseling, selection and placement, exit interviews, assessment for promotion or reassignment, and the like, And his views of “the person” and associated concepts relating to people's capacity for growth have left their mark on human resources/personnel policies, professional training and organizational development...” (p. 393)

Before POS, the PCA was influential in many early organizational development interventions during the 1960's (Montuori & Purser, 2001). Why then is there this vacuum of humanistic ideas in POS? The answer is, I think, as Montuori and Purser (2001) argue, because the 1970's and 1980's onwards saw a changing socioeconomic environment in which there was an erosion of the core values informed by humanistic psychology toward a more competitive business environment in which managers were seeking change to address the 'bottom line'. Encounter group and reflective methodologies were seen as no longer relevant. In their place were introduced what were seen as more utilitarian tools and techniques, but still using the language of freedom and liberation that was associated with the liberal humanistic agenda associated with writers such as Rogers. Montuori and Purser (2001) show how Rogers' work was usurped to provide ways of establishing control and the imposition of authority rather than its originally intended means of creating democracy and participation. In short, Rogers' ideas about developing constructive human relationships became what seemed like common sense but left adrift from their radical theoretical anchor became mechanisms of control and coercion.

As such, it is perhaps not surprising, given Montuori and Purser (2001) observation about what we would now refer to as the rise of neoliberalism, that the PCA receives so little mention in contemporary POS and POB as these emerged following the decades of the 1980' and 1990's in which the core humanistic values were eroded. Positive psychology stepped into the space that was left adopting the idea that it would be productive to look at positive qualities. But I would argue it did so as part of the neoliberal culture rather than challenging it as humanistic psychology had done. In fact, the leading positive psychologists distanced themselves as best they could from humanistic psychology in an attempt to gain credibility given how radical the ideas of humanistic psychology were still seen as by mainstream psychology in the late 1990's, deliberately choosing to play up the utilitarian functions of the

new positive psychology to attract attention from funding bodies, organizations, and governments.

Thus, while the pendulum has swung some way back, towards framing organizational development within a more positive framework, it has not swung far enough to create the democracy and participation that the PCA once brought to management studies and I/O psychology, or swung anywhere close to the potential of POS as a more humanistic discipline. There are of course notable exceptions. For example, Kopelman, Avi-Yonah, and Varghese's (2012) chapter is an excellent example of bringing the PCA into POS:

“...drawing on a person-centered theory of personality (Rogers, 1959, 1961), to promote positive human interactions, a negotiator must be genuine. Being genuine entails not hiding behind a defensive façade (e.g., cultural norms of behavior), but meeting the other with the full gamut of feelings one is experiencing (this does not necessitate displaying them)....Relating in this manner would enable a negotiator to convey empathic understanding for oneself and to the internal frame of reference of the other party and lead a negotiator to experience unconditional positive regard toward the self and the other” (p. 594).

But even so, the theoretical complexities and political implications that arise from such a way of relating are left implicit - such relationships as envisaged by Rogers dismantle traditional hierarchical structures, share power openly and transparently, and lead to non-directive dialogue. In doing so, Rogers (1959) hypothesizes, change happens, people become free to move in constructive directions. Imagine a POS that was truly grounded in the PCA. Contrast such a philosophy of bringing about change with more contemporary ideas about

promoting individual resilience, grit or mindfulness using various psychoeducational and training interventions.

It has been noted that POS does have a leaning towards a humanistic and more eudaimonic approach (Caza & Cameron, 2008), and positive psychology has in recent years moved closer towards humanistic psychology, but rarely does it lean so far as to be consistent with the full tenets of the eudaimonic approach of the PCA. It seems like POS is using a language that sounds humanistic, but actually using relationships in an instrumental and utilitarian way, to manipulate and control people. I know that I am generalizing and there are many scholars who offer exceptions to what I am saying, but by and large, from the vantage point of the PCA it is clear that the bulk of research in POS does not take an explicitly humanistic approach. I would like to see the development of new research in POS that is explicitly geared toward developing a more humanistic POS grounded in the PCA.

## DEVELOPING HUMANISTIC POS

The PCA is defined by its fundamental philosophical assumptions about human nature, i.e., the tendency towards actualization. All the different applications of the PCA - whether in the domains of business, coaching, counseling, conflict resolution, education, encounter groups, leadership, management, parenting, or psychotherapy, are all expressions of this single fundamental assumption. Whatever the domain of application, the aim is always to facilitate self-direction and self-determination. In contrast, POS is defined by its domain of application – individual and organizational performance - but has no one fundamental philosophical assumption about human nature underpinning all its activities. As a result, research is variously grounded in the range of fundamental assumptions the destructive drives in



Freudian theory, the blank slate of behaviorism, or the self-actualizing tendency of Rogerian theory. To the person-centered observer, therefore, POS seems like a rudderless ship.

POS offers the semblance of a cohesive and developing body of knowledge, but as I hope to have brought into focus is the observation that all human interactions are ultimately governed by one's deep seated philosophical assumptions about human nature. Essentially all practice involving human relations is either to control and restrict, mould and shape, or empower and free people - to describe the implications of the biologically based drives in Freudian theory, the blank slate of behaviorism, and the self-actualizing tendency of Rogerian theory, respectively (Joseph, 2017). These are underpinning but conflicting theoretical orientations that scientific research and practice into human functioning simply cannot disconnect from.

As such, while it has been said that POS has offered an alternative to the deficit model that previously shaped the design and conduct of organizational research (Caza, & Caza, 2008) this is only partly true. To the extent that there is a focus on the positive it is true, but to the extent that POS continues to operate, by and large, within the same ideology as before, that either sets out to control, restrict, mould or shape, it is not true. Self-determination as understood from the perspective of the PCA is not about controlling, restricting, moulding or shaping people, but about creating relationships that allow people to become empowered and liberated to find their own directions; hence the commitment to non-directivity. Non-directivity is a much misunderstood concept. It does not mean no direction, rather it means the practitioner is not imposing their direction, but helping the client find their own direction. Non-directivity is an ideological position that arises from the fundamental assumptions of the practitioner; but so too is directivity an ideological position.

To illustrate. Imagine research that looks at the relationship between some variable and well-being at work. It is found that the variable, be it resilience, grit, or whatever, leads

to greater well-being. The implication is that somehow increasing levels of this variable may be desirable. What sort of intervention should follow? There is nothing inherent in the finding itself that presupposes either directive or non-directive interventions. If one's vision of human nature is such that people will actualize towards greater resilience, grit, or whatever, given the right social environments, then interventions that are non-directive will make most sense. Encounter group and reflective methodologies will be the most relevant way to proceed. Only if you think that people need direction in life, and therefore disagree with the humanistic psychology of Rogers, would it seem more pertinent to think about introducing more directive interventions. The point is that the choice of interventions may look like they arise out of research findings, but actually they are *always* ideologically driven and based on the researcher's or practitioner's often unspoken and possibly unacknowledged assumptions about human nature.

My point is that assumptions about human nature are built into the design of research and the language used to discuss findings. But I see very little awareness of this in POS. At present, the ideological pendulum has swung so far away from humanistic values that it seems taken for granted in most cases that some form of directivity is needed. In general, interventions recommended within POS advocate some degree of advice giving, instruction, training, and direction. However, such recommendations must, by definition, imply a vision of human nature that is contradictory to the notion of a tendency towards actualization (Rogers, 1959). Thus, despite the similarities of POS to the PCA in terms of the humanistic values of wanting to create productive and sustainable organizational environments that bring out the best in people in ways that benefit them and the organization, the humanistic core of the PCA is not evident.

While it is true that POS offers a different non-deficit based approach concerned with the elevation of strengths, rather than a problem solving approach, that is generally where the

similarities with the PCA end. In general, scholars in POS implicitly or explicitly assume the need for expert-centered and directive approaches to create the positive institutions that they envisage. In this way, despite the language of positivity, POS seems to be as much part of the neoliberal hegemony that supports authoritarian structures, as the past research that it is supposedly replacing. Or at least, POS is providing the tools for others to implement coercive and controlling management structures under the illusion of helping workers to flourish.

Other work in POS does, however, seem to have closer similarities to person-centered psychology, such as the application of SDT to developing motivation at work (e.g., Niemiec & Spence, 2017), which as discussed above, shares the same set of assumptions about human nature as the PCA; or the use of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012), and Dialogic Organization Development (Cantore, 2017), which seem to share a similar commitment to self-directed change as the PCA.

What I am calling for is the recognition that the PCA is an established psychological paradigm that all scholars are either working within or outside of, and for POS researchers to take seriously the importance of asserting their own position in relation to the PCA. What is the view of human nature that underpins the research? And what are the implications of this view for putting POS into practice?

## CONCLUSION

In summary, from the point of view of humanistic psychology it looks like POS simply talks the language of empowerment while continuing to offer ways in which to control people as part of the neoliberal hegemony that person-centered scholars might see as the problem. What the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers brings along with its emphasis on human potential and concern for the welfare of people, is its view of human beings, with the

implication to empower and free people, to create non-hierarchical and democratic structures, in the expectation that not only was this in the best interests of the people involved and ultimately of the organizations also. As such, I would like to advocate for a more humanistic POS that makes explicit its core assumptions and develops new research and practice from the perspective of the PCA. Speaking personally, and as a university educator of over thirty years, I can see in the organizations I have worked in their transformation into competitive business environments in which an increasing number of managers seek to address the ‘bottom line’ using techniques of control and coercion, often while using the language of positivity, at the expense of health and well-being of staff and students. I hear the same stories from colleagues across many different organizations. That is my experience and why I think it is time for a more humanistic POS. We are all part of organizations and affected by them. POS is just too important a vehicle for creating a better society. But to do that it needs to stand outside the neoliberal hegemony, not be part of it, and to take greater control of how its research is put into practice by others.

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